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ABSTRACT

This book examines recent school reforms in England and Wales, the U.S.A., Australia, New Zealand and Sweden. It suggests that, at the same time as appearing to devolve power to individual schools and parents, governments have actually been increasing their own capacity to "steer" the system at a distance. Section 1 sets the scene by outlining and exploring the various policies seeking to restructure public education systems via decentralized decision making. Chapter 2 summarizes recent educational reforms in each country; chapter 3 attempts some cross-national comparisons. The second section examines the consequences of recent restructuring initiatives. Chapter 4 focuses on school leaders' changing roles, and chapter 5 explains incursions on teachers' workload. Chapter 6 explores restructuring's effects on classrooms and the curriculum. Chapter 7 explores school governance changes in different national contexts. The third section synthesizes the issues and research of previous sections. Chapter 8 examines consequences of choice and devolution for patterns of social differentiation. Recent research suggests that fragmentation of bureaucratic educational systems is leading to a polarized system, with "good" schools being rewarded and able to choose their (advantaged) students, while "failing" schools are thrown into a cycle of decline from which they and their socially disadvantaged students may not recover. Currently, choice is as likely to reinforce hierarchies as to improve educational opportunities and overall schooling quality. (Contains 433 references.) (MLH)

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